

# extra fingers

Newsletter number 1 • March 17, 2011

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## War: they can't get every answer right

**ISABELLA**, regarding her English comprehension homework: "Dad, it says here that three ships were sunk in 'wartime'. The teacher wants to know what the three ships were called that were sunk during 'wartime'. How can you know that? When's 'wartime' supposed to be? Is it the year or something that war was on?"

**DAD**: "No, no. You don't understand. 'War' doesn't happen in any particular year. Wars have been going on all the time."

**ISABELLA**: "Well then that's impossible to know. The teacher's gone and said 'in wartime' but 'wartime' is all the time."

**DAD**: "Yes, I know, but . . . but when she's saying 'wartime' it really just means the time when . . . [I knew I was in trouble] war was officially on. Do you know what I mean?"

**ISABELLA**: "No. What does that mean? What does 'officially' mean?"

**DAD**: "It means when everyone agrees that there is a war going on. In the case of your teacher, she's really just talking about 'wartime' in the sense where Australia was involved in war."

**ISABELLA**: "Oh, now I get it."

**DAD**: "Are you sure?"

**ISABELLA**: "Yes, it's our wars. She wants to know about our wars."

**DAD**: "Yeah. In this case."

**ISABELLA**: "The boats that have sunk in our wars."

**DAD**: "Yes, that's right."

**ISABELLA**: "So when did our wars happen?"

**DAD**: "Well, we've been involved in quite a few wars so you're going to have to know the dates of all those wars."

**ISABELLA**: "Which is (sic) how many dates?"

**DAD**: "Well, as a country, that means since Federation or 1901, we've been involved in World War One, World War Two—"

**ISABELLA**, venturing a guess: "World War Three?"

**DAD**: "Nope. But good try. We're not up to that one yet."

**ISABELLA**: "Oh, so when's that one going to be on?"

**DAD**: "Hopefully never."

**ISABELLA**: "Yeah. Dad, that's the crazy thing about wars. You don't have to do them but people still do."

**DAD**: "Well, that's true."

**ISABELLA**: "What's after World War Two?"

**DAD**: "Well, then there's the Korean War. We were involved in that."

**ISABELLA**: "We were involved in Korea's War?"

**DAD:** "Hmm-mm."

**ISABELLA:** "What for?"

**DAD:** "To help one part of Korea out against another part of Korea."

**ISABELLA:** "Oh. And after that?"

**DAD:** "Then we were in Vietnam."

**ISABELLA:** "Where's that?"

**DAD:** "It's a bit below where Korea is. Quite a bit below."

**ISABELLA:** "Why did we do that one for?"

**DAD:** "Well, it was to help one part of Vietnam out against another part of Vietnam."

**ISABELLA:** "How do we always know which side to be on?"

**DAD:** "America tells us."

**ISABELLA:** "America?"

## It's okay. Alison likes running.

**HOLLY:** "Dad, you should see Olivia. She really loves playing tricks on Alison."

**DAD:** "Does she?"

**HOLLY:** "Yeah. Every now and then she likes to run off with some of her stuff. You know, like pencils and pencil cases. But it's okay, Dad."

**DAD:** "Is it?"

**HOLLY:** "Yeah. Because Alison quite likes running."

**DAD:** "Yeah."

**ISABELLA:** "But how do they know?"

**DAD:** "They just do. It's usually always been the case that the top two countries in the world – they're the ones with the most guns and bombs and warships and warplanes etc. at any particular time – have always told all the smaller countries who to fight against."

**ISABELLA:** "And then they just watch?"

**DAD:** "No. The two top countries are usually always against each other. The top two countries in the world have usually always gone to war with each other and the smaller countries just join in."

**ISABELLA:** "Dad, that's not a very smart thing to do. America could be wrong sometimes."

**DAD:** "You think so?"

**ISABELLA,** scoffing: "Yeah! Of course they could be. What do you think they are? Really amazing or something!"

## They go around the class

**AMELIE:** "Dad, the other day at school, before I was about to go on the mat, Mrs Johnson [an extra teacher] asked me who I thought I needed to care about the most. She said, 'Is it you?' And I said, 'No'."

**DAD:** "Oh. And what did Mrs Johnson say then?"

**AMELIE:** "She said, 'Yes, it is.'"

**DAD:** "Oh, did she?"

**AMELIE:** "Yeah."

**DAD:** "And then what happened?"

**Amelie:** "I don't know. I had my head down playing after that so I don't know what happened next. She might have gone to the next table. They go around the class."



## Around the World with Holly and Annie

Planning for Holly and her friend, Annie's, circumnavigation of the world began at 2pm on Saturday March 12th and the course was all decided upon before the hour was out. Their trip would include no fewer than thirty stops but overlook, by many thousands of kilometres, half a dozen globular blobs they'd drawn to represent the thirteen thousand or so islands that make up Indonesia. As would it fail to include half the world's population by jetting effortlessly over, at 10,000m, most of Asia without even feeling the need to touch down to refuel. You could sense that this trip around the planet would be a pretty quick one.

Holly and Annie began their journey with a red line by driving from Perth to Joondalup before hopping onto a plane there and heading north to Broome. Then, after Broome, they're off to Alice Springs, then The Great Barrier Reef (where landing in the ocean to save time, presumably, appears to be no

great barrier to them), then they're off to Brisbane and the Gold Coast (which appear to have traded places with each other), then it's on to Sydney before, finally, arriving in Newcastle, which had moved around 400kms west of Sydney. That's where the Australian leg of their world tour appears to end.

From 'Newcastle', the girls would fly to Auckland, then on to Rotorua, then to Wellington, then to the Orong bike and horse trail – probably one of the most eccentric places you could stick an airport. Then it would be a quick flight down to Queenstown before flying north until they got to Brazil where the pilot would abruptly land so Holly and Annie could have a peek at the Iguazu Falls. I love their next stop. Not only has California shrunk dramatically to become simply a city, but it's also followed the lead of Newcastle and relocated to New Orleans. After stop-offs in Orlando, Washington DC (now a coastal city), Baltimore and New York

(now part of Canada), the girls then fly to Milan, in, well, the north of Pakistan by the looks of things. [Incidentally, I hope their mapping of India isn't the shape of things to come for that country. Sri Lanka's disappeared altogether.]

After Milan, it's then on to Turin in Turkey – I'm thinking Turkey because it's right above where they have Egypt – before they then fly off to Athens, which they've strangely situated in either Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, the United Arab Emirates or possibly even Kuwait. After that it's on to Cairo, an African safari in the Sahara, a quick trip to Venice and Rome, a stop-off in Paris, which is now in the middle of Spain; then it's on to London, then to Wales in general, then Glasgow where Aberdeen used to be, then Belfast, before flying back home to Perth.

Quite a trip really. Makes all the boundary changes in Europe following the Treaty of Versailles look like Germany had nothing to complain about. Particularly as Holly and Annie had been planning their trip during a time of relative peace in the world.

## Side-splitting

**AMELIE**, referring to a very inspiring man she saw on Youtube who had no arms or legs: "Would he be able to do the splits?"

## I'm serious!

**HOLLY**, after her laptop power cord went missing the moment it went into her bedroom on Sunday: "How should I know where the stupid thing is, Dad? I'm not its mother. Things just sometimes go in my room and then disappear all by themselves. I don't do anything. Hey, wait a minute. You've lost it, haven't you?"

**DAD**, horrified: "What! Are you joking?"

**HOLLY**: "No. I bet you lost it and now you're blaming me for it."

**DAD**, fuming: "But I only just gave you the cord a minute ago! You know, when I was telling you to put it away."

**HOLLY**, nonchalantly: "Yeah, I know. And now it's gone. But Dad, the best thing is I went around my room today looking for things I didn't know I had and—"

**DAD**: "Things like laptop cords, for instance?"

**HOLLY**, tittering: "Da-ad! Not that. You know I don't know where that is [Back to the story she was telling] . . . I started to find all these coins. It was amazing! It didn't realise how rich I was."

**DAD**: "Were they gold coins?"

**HOLLY**: "A few of them were."

**DAD**: "Good. Now they're all mine and you can throw in all the others too because they can be used to buy another laptop cord."

**HOLLY**: "Da-ad!"

**DAD**: "I'm serious."

**HOLLY**: "Yeah, but not for always. You can't keep looking at me like that forever. No one can."

I managed to maintain a look of contempt on my face and remain silent for what seemed an eternity.

**HOLLY**, sixty seconds later: "Da-ad! You're beginning to bug me . . . [Five seconds later] Alright! I'll find the cord."

## It's supposed to be very good exercise

**ISABELLA**: "Dad, did you know that laughing is supposed to be good for you?"

**DAD**, feigning ignorance: "Is it?"

**ISABELLA**: "Yeah. It's supposed to be very good exercise. So how many laps would an hour of laughing add up to?"

**DAD**: "You mean as in runs around the block?"

**ISABELLA:** "Yeah. Would it count for ten laps?"

**DAD,** scoffing: "No."

**ISABELLA,** feeling the need to radically adjust her sights: "What about two then?"

**DAD:** "An hour's laughter, right? With no stopping?"

**ISABELLA:** "Oh, no. You'd be able to have lots of breaks. Even during Mr Bean I take lots of breaks."

## The Annie dictionary

**HOLLY,** after getting back from school camp on Friday: "Dad, what does 'melancholy' mean?"

**DAD:** "'Melancholy'?"

**HOLLY:** "Yeah."

**DAD:** "Um, well it means sort of sad, or depressed, or being down for a long long time."

**HOLLY:** "You know what Annie thought it meant?"

**DAD:** "What?"

**HOLLY:** "She thought, um, it was a watermelon crossed with a cauliflower."

**DAD:** "Really?"

**HOLLY:** "Yes. She said to her mum 'That must be a very odd food.' And her mum said, 'What?' And Annie said, 'A watermelon crossed with a cauliflower?'. And her mum goes, 'What?' Annie said to me later, 'I love the word 'melancholy'. It's my favourite word. I know it shouldn't be but I just love it. I just love the word. It makes me laugh and it makes me feel really happy.' She said, 'I think it should mean 'happy' because it's not like all the other sad words. They [sad words] make you feel sad; they make you think of sad things and stuff.' And I said to her, 'Well, 'melancholy' has the wrong affect

on you.' And she goes, 'Well, when you say the word 'depressed' it makes you sound depressed and so does 'sad'. It makes you sound sad too. But 'melancholy', the sound of it, doesn't. It just reminds me of the sun.'"

**DAD:** "Of the what?"

**HOLLY:** "She said, 'The sun and yellow and that means 'happy' [for her]'. And it also reminded her of the melon crossed with the cauliflower, of course."

**DAD:** "Well, she's not going to remember 'melancholy' for its real meaning, is she?"

**HOLLY:** "No, I know. She calls it the Annie dictionary. She said, 'Well, I have an Annie dictionary and 'melancholy' in my dictionary means 'very happy' or 'a melon crossed with a cauliflower.'"

## The 'blast-off' wee

**AMELIE,** on Sunday, urgently wanting the family to stop as we were riding to the WA Writers Festival: "Dad, I'm busting. We have to stop!"

**DAD:** "Oh, can't it wait, Amelie? Can't you just wait until we get to the festival? It's not that far."

**AMELIE:** "No, Dad. I have to stop now. I can't wait any longer because it's a 'blast-off' wee."

**DAD:** "A 'blast-off' wee? What on earth is a 'blast-off' wee?"

**AMELIE:** "It's a wee that goes faster than a train."